

WINNER: Phoebe Brown
AUTHOR & BOOK: Sarah Miller - *Miss Spitfire*
COMPETITION LEVEL: I (Grades 4-6)

12/9/07

Dear Ms. Miller,

Ms. Spitfire. The name says it all! The character Annie Sullivan has inspired me completely! Her determination to ‘fix’ Helen reminded me of how important it is to set a goal, believe in yourself, and never give up. It was nice to see that she successfully created in Helen, a ‘mind full of words’. There are times when I falter and doubt myself. But after reading your book, my determination became ten times more than it was before I had started. I realized that success comes to those who don’t give up on their dreams. Annie made the impossible, possible.

I remember when I first entered 4th grade. At first, it was really tough, but I kept reminding myself to not give up. I was introduced to this book in October of 2007. It really turned me around! I was in complete awe of Annie. I’m sure it must have taken a lot out of her to control a child as stubborn as Helen. But she was determined! Her determination in turn motivated me to raise my bar in fourth grade and not get frustrated about hard work. No matter how tough life was, I just kept moving on and on. Even the death of her brother didn’t stop her. It didn’t stop her from creating successful life for herself. It made me think of the people who have it worse than me. I stopped complaining! I started to see the glass half full, rather than half empty.

Clearly, this was a big life lesson for me. Ever since I have read the book, I constantly remind myself that believing in yourself and not wavering from your goal results in success. Initially, I was not a good writer, but I took my teacher’s criticism constructively and took Annie’s courage to heart. Today I can safely say that I am much better at writing. Faith is the word that comes to my mind. Just as Annie had faith in Helen’s capabilities, my teacher has faith in mine. Faith can move mountains. As they truly say, “The results are in the pudding!”

It’s truly amazing to see how many life lessons I’ve learned just by reading your book! Through Annie, you have truly inspired me to continue being determined, have faith, and see things in a more positive light.

Sincerely,

Phoebe Brown

WINNER: Gabrielle Montesanti

AUTHOR & BOOK: Jesse Stuart - *Come to My Tomorrowland*

COMPETITION LEVEL: II (Grades 7-8)

Dear Mr. Stuart,

A few years ago, I had to undergo two operations on my feet. The hideous experience was the biggest obstacle I've ever had to overcome. Like Joy Burton, it was hard for me to keep living to the fullest. Thankfully, Come to My Tomorrowland arrived on my doorstep as a present from my grandmother one week before the operation. I don't think she could possibly have known that the inspirational story of Joy Burton and her albino lamb was exactly the gift I needed to overcome my scars.

Unlike Joy, when my doctor proposed a double surgery to me I was scared and hesitant. Not only did I have to endure nightmares about long, gleaming screws in my bones, and bloody, crimson scars, but knowing that my doctor had never performed this operation on a child before made everything ten times worse. A single mistake would be costly. There seemed to be so many ways for the procedure to go terrible wrong. When I read about a teenage girl who had battled through her Polio, it gave me hope that I could battle through as well. I also began to feel more thankful for my blessings, instead of miserable because of my disabilities. Joy's faith and hope were with me in that operating room, and after the surgery when I was trying to bring every gloomy place as much happiness as she did.

Sometimes during my recovery, I felt like Snowball hanging from the ceiling. I hated having to completely rely on others. I hated all the sympathy, chocolates, and cards I was receiving because they were a constant reminder of my throbbing, aching, sliced open feet. I hated the feeling that other people were taking pity on me. I hated feeling *different*. I was thankful to have a book I could relate to, and a friend (whether fictional or not) who understood.

The most inspiring parts of your book were when Joy visited her Tomorrowland. When I was recovering after the operation that summer, I found comfort in that world as well. However childish it may seem, I took after a fictional character by creating my own place of comfort and security. Even now, two years later, I look back on my own Tomorrowland, knowing that it will always be there.

Before the events that happened the summer I turned 11, I could never understand why God allows good people to suffer. I believe that without your book (and Joy Burton) I

may still be searching for the answer. I would have never imagined that possibly, all this hurting and suffering was the course He intended for us to take all along. Maybe, through our suffering, He's intending that we make a difference one day that could change the world. I think that disabilities are just His way of showing us that we can overcome anything. God works in mysterious ways, and although I didn't think so at the time, maybe your book was merely a chance for me to open my eyes. After your book, I could see all the people who are suffering, and hurting, and longing more than I could possible imagine. Joy proved to me that we *can* be strong people while our legs may be weak. She proved that we can do anything with hope and faith. I made a miraculous recovery like Joy and Snowball, and I will always remember the lesson I learned along the way. I decided I might want to be a pediatrician or a teacher when I'm older, so I can comfort the children who are still battling. I have faith in them, and I can only hope that the scars on my feet and the screws in my bones are enough to inspire them as much as Joy inspired my. Live life to the fullest, no matter what you're battling.

Thank you, Mr. Stuart, for creating a character so strong willed, selfless, and inspirational as Joy Burton, without whom I may not have had faith.

Sincerely,
Gabrielle Montesanti

WINNER: Katelynn Wright

AUTHOR & BOOK: Gerda Weissman Klein - *All But My Life*

COMPETITION LEVEL: III (Grades 9-12)

December 12, 2007

Dear Mrs. Klein,

Hour by hour, day by day, we live our lives on a schedule. We wake up at six-thirty and go to bed at nine. If something in our schedule is not done precisely in order, then we often will become distressed. Your book, *All But My Life*, made me think that people get upset and disgruntled over the silliest of things. It is not as if you planned that your brother would be forced to leave or that you would find yourself under Nazi control. If people were to stop and think about what really matters, we might have a much happier society. But through all these difficulties you were able to rise above and keep living your life.

Throughout your life you have had numerous conflicts, and have been able to overcome them all. Often I wonder what I would do in a situation like that. Would I be able to rise above such obstacles as you did? Throughout my life, I have not been faced with any real hardship. I have never had to worry or stress over every day matters because everything has always been done for me. Although I don't have very much in common with you, I have learned quite a bit from you and your book. When times were the worst, no matter the situation you always found a way to keep people going. Your overwhelming steadfast nature helped many people to live on even if it was only for another day. Even today you continue to help and change peoples lives in your battle against discrimination. This made me think, "What could I do to make a difference in someone else's life that could make such an impact as Gerda has done?" After thinking it over, I came to the conclusion that nothing I am capable of doing could bring the same type of strength and joy you have brought to people. The stability that you brought to people was the greatest gift that a person could give. You gave them the gift of light in what seemed to be an overwhelming dark world.

However, I have a very sickly neighbor who is very weak and lonely. She is unable to get out of the house and go shopping or enjoy herself as many people do. On one occasion as my mom and I were taking her to the hospital for one of her numerous visits, I thought about you and what you had done for Ilse, and I realized that if there was something I could do for my neighbor, now is the opportunity. When we were sitting in the waiting room for her named to be called, I began asking her what she was interested in and

what hobbies she had. She simply stated that she was very much interested in history and especially the Holocaust and WWII. Being a history buff myself, we soon found out that we had much in common. I had never seen my neighbor so alive. She was as interested in what I was saying about you and your life, as I was when she was talking about different books she had read and television shows she had watched. When we got home, I realized that I had just made an impact on someone's life and that I really had the power to help someone. That was the only time in my life that I had felt that I had made a difference and that I had the power to change someone's life. I will never forget that moment. Now I try to go out of my way to see what I can offer to people to make their lives better. You have not only changed my life but the lives of many others.

In life, a person often wonders what makes someone good, what make a human being whole. After reading your book, I think we only know when we have reached that point when we are able to sit back and reflect on what we have done in our lives. When I look back at your life and the hardships you have overcome and the way that you continue to change people's lives, my only hope is that I can become half of what you are. When you look back at your life, I hope you are able to see what I see – a very strong, outgoing, overall good person.

Thank you for all that you have done and continue to do to change people's lives.

Sincerely,
Katelynn Wright